

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7194

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY JUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: NA

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SUBJ: SYRIAN MEDIA IGNORES QANSO'S HARDLINE STAND ON LEBANON

1. ASSEM QANSO'S TOUGH REMARKS OF MARCH 3 OFFERING A SIX-PART PROGRAM FOR LEBANON HAVE FAILED TO FIND AN ECHO IN THE SYRIAN MEDIA. QANSO CALLED FOR 1) DISMANTLING THE CURRENT LEBANESE ARMY AND FORMING NEW ARMY ON BASIS OF COMPULSORY DRAFT, NOT RELIGION; 2) DISMANTLING THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ANT TRYING THEIR LEADERS BY COURT MARTIAL; 3) RE-TURNING LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SOUTH; 4) DEVELOPING A NEW PLAN FOR CO-EXISTENCE WITH THE PALESTINIANS; 5) COLLECTING ARMS FROM ALL LEBANESE CIVILIANS; AND 6) ESTABLISHING AN ARAB ORIENTATION IN LEBANON ESPECIALLY TOWARD SYRIA. HIS REMARKS REMAIN UNREPORTED HERE AND COMMENTARIES AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EDITORIALSON LEBANON HAVE NOT ECHOED HIS APPEAL.

2. AN INTERVIEW WITH SYRIAN-BACKED NASSERIST LEADER KAMAL SHATILA DID APPEAR MARCH 11 IN THAWRA IN WHICH SHATELA CALLS FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND A DIALOGUE TO "REFORMULATE POLITICAL LIFE IN LEBANON AWAY FROM THE OLD SYSTEM." IN THE INTERVIEW, SHATELA SAYS THE NATIONAL FRONT

WANTS LEBANON'S PROBLEMS STUDIED ON THE BASIS OF THE FOLLOWING LESSONS:

- A) FAILURE OF THE CONCEPT THAT FOREIGN GUARANTEES COULD PROTECT LEBANESE SECTS, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SEPARATING LEBANON FROM THE ARAB LEAGUE AND PARTICULARLY SYRIA "WHICH SURROUNDS LEBANON IN A BROTHERLY MANNER."
- B) CAREFUL STUDY OF THE REASONS WHICH CAUSED THE LEBANESE ARMY TO SPLIT.
- C) SHORTCOMINGS OF THE OLD REGIME CAUSING ECONOMIC CHAOS, SOCIAL TERRORISM, AND POLITICAL MONOPOLY...

3. WHAT SYRIAN EDITORIALS DRFMMAKE CLEAR IS THAT "SYRIA IN THE NATIONAL ARMY OF LEBANON" UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS, AND HE "HAS THE ULTIMATE RIGHT TO USE THIS ARMY IN ANYTHING GUARANTEEING HIS CONTROL OVER THE COUNTRY" (TISHRIIN, MARCH 2). AN EDITORIAL ON MARCH 7 IN BAATH IN A WARNING CLEARLY INTENDED FOR THE LEBANESE RIGHT STATES THAT "IF SOME OF THEM (RIGHTISTS) THINK THAT THEIR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLITICAL EQUATIONS CAN OFFER THEM SUFFICIENT STRENGTH TO CONTINUE IN THIS WAY (OBSTRUCTIONISM) THEY ARE DELUDED AND INCAPABLE OF COMPREHENDING THE FACTS OF THE SITUATION. IN THIS THEY WOULD BE ADOPTING A POSITION UNACCEPTABLE FOR A NEW LEBANON-- A LEBANON WITH AN ARAB FACE...WITH ALL THAT IMPLIES."

4. MOST RECENT EDITORIAL ON LEBANON APPEARED MARCH 10 IN AL-BAATH AND URGED SARKIS TO FORGE AHEAD IN ACHIEVING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RECONCILIATION DESPITE THE OPPOSITION OF VARIOUS FRACTIONS. COLUMNIST THEN ASSERTS THAT IN THE EVENT THE LEGITIMATE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES MOVE ON THIS QUESTION, THEY "WILL FIND SUPPORT THAT WILL TRANSCEND LEBANON'S BORDERS."

5. COMMENT: SINCE THE SYRO-RIGHTIST FIGHTING, GENERAL THRUST OF SYRIAN COMMENTARY HAS LEVELED A GREAT DEAL OF IMPLIED CRITICISM AT THE LEBANESE FRONT. SEVERAL OMINOUS COMMENTS HAVE APPEARED ABOUT THE ADF BEING THE ONLY LEGITIMATE NATIONAL ARMY IN LEBANON FOR NOW AND CREATING A LEBANON "WITH AN ARAB FACE" HAVING CLOSE TIES TO SYRIA. NOTHING HAS APPEARED TO SUPPORT QANSO'S TOUGH TALK ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE HE WOULD HAVE MADE SUCH INTEMPERATE REMARKS WITHOUT HIGH-LEVEL SYRIAN PROMPTING. AT A MINIMUM HIS REMARKS WERE INTENDED AS A WARNING THAT SYRIA COULD FURTHER TIGHTEN THE SCREWS ON THE RIGHT IF IT WISHED.

MURPHY

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